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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on participants in a state-mandated mentoring program for beginning school teachers, counselors, and librarians during their first year of teaching. Participants included 13 mentor teachers, 1 mentor school counselor, 13 beginning teachers, and 2 beginning librarians. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. In general, participants supported the provision of assistance to beginning teachers, counselors, and librarians in the form of mentoring programs pairing beginners with experienced colleagues. However, it appears that little guidance was provided to them about what mentoring involved and about the various roles mentors can play. Participants consistently emphasized the need for more guidance, in the form of written guidelines, orientations, or brief training sessions for mentors. Most participants defined the primary roles of a mentor as a provider of emotional support and of assistance with logistical matters. (IAH)

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What are the Important Mentor Roles:

Perceptions of Participants in a State-Mandated Mentoring Program

(Draft)

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February 27, 1992

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Background

In the mid-1980s the legislation of a centrally located state passed an educational reform act. One provision of this act requires school districts to establish mentoring programs for beginning school teachers, counselors, and librarians during their first year of employment. "Beginning" is defined to include experienced personnel who are new to a district or who are re-entering the workplace after several years' absence, in addition to those who are starting their career.

Although the act requires districts to establish mentoring programs, little funding is provided to cover associated costs, and little direction is given in formulating program goals, design, implementation, or evaluation. The reform act called for school districts to pilot a mentoring program during 1988-89 and to have a program in place during the 1989-90 school year.

Participants and Study Design

Participants

The participants in this study include 13 mentor teachers and one mentor school counselor, and 13 beginning teachers and two beginning librarians, from three different school districts. These persons were identified by school officials as participating in a mentoring program during 1989-90. Harrison is an urban district, Pierce is a suburban district, and Fillmore is a rural district. Selected characteristics of these districts is provided in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

The participants are predominantly female and white, although they differ in age, teaching experience, and school level. Selected information about the participants is provided in Tables 2 and 3.

Insert Table 2 about here

Insert Table 3 about here

Data Collection

Between May 29 and June 14, 1990, each of the 29 participants was interviewed once. Twenty-six interviews were tape-recorded. The interviews ranged from 16 to 51 minutes in length, and averaged 29 minutes for both the beginners and the mentors. Three participants preferred that their interviews not be tape-recorded. In these cases notes were taken during the interviews and later expanded. Verbatim transcriptions of the tape-recordings were prepared.

The interviews were semi-structured and included questions related to (1) the mentor's prior experience in formal and informal mentoring situations, or the beginner's teacher preparation program and work schedule, (2) characteristics of effective mentoring programs,

(3) specific features of mentoring programs [e.g., physical proximity of beginners and mentors], (4) factors used in matching beginners and mentors, and (5) benefits and problems of mentoring programs.

Data Analysis

Transcriptions were read three times for emergent categories of information (Lofland & Lofland, 1984; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Preliminary categories were expanded or collapsed, and criteria for inclusion of data in categories were established. This process resulted in six major categories, each containing two or more sub-categories:

(1) mentor characteristics [2 sub-categories],

(2) mentor roles [9 sub-categories],

(3) matching factors [6 sub-categories],

(4) features of formal mentoring programs [7 sub-categories],

(5) benefits of mentor programs [9 sub-categories], and

(6) potential problems of mentor programs [3 sub-categories].

The transcriptions were read again in preparing this paper. A computer program was used to facilitate the mechanical process of coding transcriptions, and the sorting and retrieval of coded segments (Seidel, Kjolseth, & Seymour, 1988).

Mentor Roles

Participants offer a wide range of opinions about how assertive mentors should be in carrying out mentoring activities. In general, they present an image of the mentor as someone who offers information, advice, and suggestions to the beginner, but who avoids

and her beginner approach their work, saying "She has her way of teaching and I have mine."

Some beginners, including Rachel, Nora, and Gina, suggest that in some matters, any attempt by the mentor to influence the beginner is inappropriate. As Rachel says, "Some things you just have to learn on your own. You can't be spoon fed." ORA and LORI, believe that sometimes mentors must let beginners "learn the hard way." LORI observes, "A lot of these young teachers have to learn by experience just like our children do. It's the same old thing. You can tell a child not to touch something hot but when they've done it themselves, they're going to remember it more. And I think that is the way in teaching, too." ORA reveals that her beginner was not receptive to her help until after she had experienced significant problems. "She had to go through some terrible times with parents, with the children, with the things she was doing," ORA recalls, "for her to be able to come to me and say, 'I need your help.'"

The depiction of the mentor as remaining in the background is offset by some participants' suggestion that a mentor should be more forward in taking steps to ensure that things go well for the beginner. Ursula describes her mentor as "concerned with how I was doing and making sure that everything was going well for me." Similarly, TAMMI describes the mentor as "a person who is going to give constructive criticism, support, pep talks, to make that beginning teacher successful." IRMA says, "I feel the mentor is there to keep them from getting a bad evaluation, keep them from developing some of these problems." ANN believes, "If we could spare them the trial and error, that would be good in and of itself."

pressuring the beginner in any way. For example, BRUCE says, "Mentors shouldn't have power to force ideas on the beginning teacher. . . . I don't think mentors should have any real authority. If you have authority you're the administrator, the principal." ***(Note: In order to clarify the sources of information, pseudonyms for the mentors are written in all capital letters [e.g., NINA], while only the first letter of pseudonyms for the beginners is capitalized [e.g., Zoe]).*** ANN cautions that mentors should not be overbearing and should avoid "dictating ways of teaching" to the beginner. Gina voices a similar sentiment, noting that mentoring is "not someone telling them what to do." In describing mentoring for the beginner, NINA emphasizes, "It's there and take advantage of it if you need it, and if you don't, well, that's up to you." Similarly, MARGE stresses, "I definitely don't want to push my ideas onto this person. I want to suggest and guide, and then they can take it or go with their own teaching methods and philosophies."

Support and Encouragement

Participants suggest that one important role of the mentor is "to help this person find their own style" (TAMMI). To this end, the mentor's task is to encourage some experimentation. "I always tell them to try different approaches," says EVE. "I always have lots of options and choices for these people I'm working with so they don't feel like there's just one right way, and if they have made a mistake then there's other ways to work on that and other ways to improve." Zoe makes a similar comment, "You [beginner] see other people's styles. And not everything's going to work for you. That doesn't mean that it's right or wrong, but you could at least decide, pick and choose. . . . What you want to use or don't want to use." LORI admits that there is a fundamental difference in how she

Many participants emphasize that mentors should anticipate the needs of beginners and provide them with information or advice before they seek it. For example, TAMMI believes that part of mentoring is "just thinking far enough ahead to see what needs to be discussed before it arises," and EVE suggests that mentors "need to have insight into what they might need that they don't even know about yet." Among the participants, the beginners readily admit to lacking the ability--or courage--to ask the right questions. Becky comments, "As a first-year teacher you don't think of these things to ask. You don't know what to ask them." Similarly, Debby recommends that mentors take the initiative in "answering a lot of the questions maybe that either a brand new teacher may be afraid or embarrassed to ask about."

The willingness of mentors to take an active role in assisting beginners is associated with a desire to share their work experiences. Sometimes the sharing is done for the sake of sharing, as evident in MARGE's comment: "Those of us with experience sometimes have maybe some wisdom that others don't have. Just because of our age." SUE associates sharing with breaking down isolation. "We need to share more about what we're doing in our classrooms," she observes. "We tend to be real isolated. And that [i.e., sharing] would help all of us."

Some mentors describe sharing their experience with beginners as an important way to make use of it. "You've got a lot of stuff up in your head sometimes," says NINA. "I just feel like I could tell them how to do that. You shouldn't waste it, I mean. I feel like, use it again. Put it to some use." Other mentors see sharing their experience as an alternative to learning about teaching through experience. LORI believes that mentors should

be willing to share the "pitfalls" of teaching, and DIANE views sharing her experience as one way of helping her beginner to avoid "re-inventing the wheel": "Teachers are sitting in their classrooms every year trying to figure out things. If they just get out and talk to people, [they will find that] they were figured out a long, long time ago."

From time to time, participants compare the mentor/beginner relationship to other relationships. RITA compares her relationship with her beginner to a "mother-daughter situation," whereas Mary suggests that personality conflicts between mentor and beginner can be "just like husband and wife." ORA implies that she views her responsibilities toward her beginner in yet another way: "I took her on as I would take on the children [viz., in her class], and felt that kind of responsibility with her."

Frequently, mentors compare serving as a mentor to serving as a cooperating teacher for a student teacher. For example, SUE says, "If I were asked to be a mentor teacher I wouldn't do it because there was going to be any reward. I would do it because I like working with beginning teachers. I like working with student teachers. That to me is exciting." ORA believes that serving as a mentor is "a lot like taking a student teacher. I mean you have to be a certain kind of person." Mentors also compare the problems of working with beginners to the problems of working with student teachers. MARGE suggests that some experienced teachers may refuse to serve as mentors for the same reason they refuse to work with student teachers: "There are people who refuse to take student teachers too because they don't want any interference in their classroom." LORI compares a weakness in her beginning teacher to a weakness in a student teacher: "I guess I have to look back at a student teacher I had year before last. He was always trying to do something that I felt

was above the children's capacities." Heather expresses concern that a mentor, like a cooperating teacher, may take on the additional responsibility unwillingly in order to fulfill requirements on the career ladder.

The participants consistently highlight the role of the mentor as someone who is "always there" and to whom the beginner can turn for support, encouragement, and advice. EVE says, "They need someone to listen to them when they are frustrated and upset or discouraged. They need someone to talk to that's been there and can relate to that. They always appreciate an ear." MARGE makes a similar observation: "Just to have someone there that they know they can go to if they have a problem is probably the most important thing." NINA suggests that her willingness to "be there" was prominent when she was approached about mentoring. She recalls, "They said, 'Would you be her mentor?' and I said, 'Well, what do I do?' and they said, 'Well, you're just there if she needs you, or you help her out.'" The beginners also stress this role for the mentor. For example, Heather summarizes the role of a mentor as "just [to] support and give help," and describes a mentor as "just a friend." Lisa comments that "The mentor does an awful lot of giving. A lot of sharing. A lot of supporting."

Many participants suggest that providing support requires some initiative on the part of the mentor, rather than waiting for the beginner to come forward. Several mentors emphasize this point. For instance, LORI believes that mentors need to "build up their ego" in order to "keep them from having a bad attitude about their own self." DIANE views a major part of her mentoring responsibility as working "to keep them encouraged and moving . . . when you see they're getting overpowered." The beginners stress this point as well.

Nora notes that "It's always nice to have someone tell you the things that you do that are good," and Lucy describes a time that her mentor "came to bat" for her. Lisa's comments in this regard are typical of many of the beginners: "You have someone to identify with you, to empathize with you, to offer possible solutions, to give you moral support. And someone [who] could also remind you that, 'Yes, the first year is always rough. Hang in there. You will survive.'"

A critical feature of this support function is the understanding that it is all right for beginners to ask mentors "stupid" questions. This helps to overcome what Rachel sees as a significant problem for the novice: "A lot of people are afraid to ask a lot of stupid questions about simple matters." For Rachel, talking with her mentor is important because he is "another adult who knew my job." Becky believes that the mentoring relationship "should be open where you can ask as many questions, whether they're stupid questions or not." Confidentiality in these matters is critical, as noted by TAMMI: "There's going to be someone that you can say, 'This failed miserably,' and they're not going to run, tell the whole faculty, and it's not going to come back and haunt them later on some type of evaluative process. Knowing that there is someone that you can talk to who will offer advice, but who is never going to hold that over your head or file it for future reference." BRUCE points out that, in this regard, a mentor functions as a substitute for the principal, so that the beginner does not always have to go to the principal to ask questions, thereby "revealing weaker points."

Curriculum and Teaching

Although the mentor's role in providing support and encouragement to beginners is

very prominent among the participants, it is not the only role they ascribe to the mentor. In fact, TAMMI argues that there must be more to mentoring than just "Tell me your problems over a cup of coffee." One additional role mentioned is the mentor's sharing information about the curriculum. For example, Nora comments that it is "nice to have another teacher or mentor on that grade level so you can talk about textbook things and talk about student ability at that level." Nancy believes that a mentor offers the beginner someone whom a beginner can "bounce off these curriculum ideas." LORI is unique among the participants in suggesting that being a curriculum expert if the mentor's most important role, believing "What we teach the children to me is the most important." Elements of the curriculum which LORI emphasizes as part of the mentor's responsibility include "How fast or how slow are some of the programs," "How they want the academics presented," and the sequence of the curriculum: "You're to do this at a certain time and you're to have this program in at a certain time."

More typically, the role of the mentor relative to the curriculum is limited to sharing material, such as providing the beginner with copies of handouts (Gina) and allowing the beginner direct access to the mentor's personal files and materials (Lisa, SUE). Lisa is also thankful that her mentor helps her to become familiar with resource materials available for her use. In addition, Ursula refers to her mentor's pointing out professional development resources, specifically, "books on classroom management and teaching strategies." Some mentors are very active in providing beginners with resources. For example, Ursula notes that her mentor "was always looking for things for me." EVE indicates that this is a fundamental part of her work as a mentor: "If I come across a really neat book or a good

worksheet, I make an extra copy or I loan it out to whoever might want it. Put this in your file. You never know when you'll need this."

Much as curriculum expertise is a relatively minor role played by mentors, as described by participants, so too is expertise in teaching skills. There is some implication among the mentors that this is one of their roles, but little mention of it among the beginners. For example, IRMA refers to observing the beginner teaching in order to "sit here for awhile and see if there is something I can suggest" and TAMMI indicates a need for her beginner "to come in and watch me." RUTH, MARGE, and ANN are unusual among the participants in suggesting that at least mentors must be competent teachers. RUTH believes that mentors "should be well versed on the latest trends in education and should have tried those" and MARGE stipulates that one important role of the mentor is to make the beginner "a better teacher." ANN includes among a mentor's responsibility demonstration teaching.

Although there is relatively little evidence among the participants' remarks about mentoring activities which focus on broad curriculum or instructional matters, there are indications that beginners turn to mentors for advice on specific matters. Zoe mentions talking with her mentor about "how to assign point values . . . like how much should something be worth and other things, like participation grades." Lisa suggests that the mentor is a source of information about different learning styles and different lesson plan formats. Nora describes the mentor as someone to whom the beginner can turn for a answers to questions like, "Do I give them all twenty spelling questions or do I give them ten?" The mentors, as well, mention specific elements of teaching which they discuss with

beginners, including Individual Educational Plans and grading papers (DIANE), lesson plans (RITA), communication with parents (LORI), and classroom discipline (BRUCE).

Logistics and Paperwork

Emerging from the participants' remarks as a more important role for the mentor than demonstrating curricular and instructional expertise, is providing the beginner with information about the logistics of working in a school. SUE's comments are representative: "[The] first thing that a new teacher has to have is help with just the way the school runs. Who do you see when you have a problem? Where do you get books, desks, etc.? How do you fill out forms that have to be filled out? Where do you go for assemblies? That type of thing. Just the logistics of the situation." For this reason, mentors indicate efforts in many areas, from "familiarizing beginning teachers with programs in the school and especially the jargon and acronyms" (ANN) to answering questions like "What day do we get paid" (DIANE).

While these logistical issues are sometimes referred to as "bookkeeping" matters, they are more typically described as "paperwork" problems. Many mentors view assisting beginners in coming to grips with paperwork as their most important function, and one which can sometimes save the occupational life of the beginning teacher. There is general agreement that beginners are unprepared for this paperwork. MARGE observes, "These students come out of college with no concept of the amount of paperwork they have to do being a classroom teacher, that they think their time is going to be spent with these children teaching school and they have absolutely no idea."

Importantly, some participants suggest that the beginner cannot really begin teaching

until paperwork and other logistical problems are addressed, as evident in SUE's comments: "Honestly--and this maybe sounds really terrible--but for a beginning teacher, the main thing to worry about probably for the first three months is just how to get around the school and how to take care of the day-to-day business that's so automatic for the rest of us. And then you can kind of be worried about teaching. Elements of "day-to-day business" mentioned by participants include student records and cumulative files (LORI), attendance records (Zoe), field trip procedures (Cathy), and even the location of the Scantron machine (Rachel). Debby suggests a checklist to outline the type of information needed: "Just a simple checklist type of thing to show the new teacher: Where the different closets are, where the science materials are kept for experiments, where do you get the construction paper, what can you order, where are the workbooks." DIANE also believes that paperwork demands are directly related to teacher burn-out. She says, "I would say probably that helping them to deal with the massive amount of paperwork would be number one. Because if they can do that, most people can stay in teaching. In my experience, most people who have burned out in teaching have just thrown up their hands to what they consider the administrative paperwork which comes down the pike to the teacher."

Fitting In

The role played by mentors in helping beginners to become familiar with "paperwork" is part of the larger role of helping them to become acclimated to a new work environment. For example, BRUCE believes that a primary task for the mentor is helping the beginner to fit into a new school. Often this is compared to moving into a new home. NINA talks about a mentor's obligation to "make sure they feel at home in this situation,"

and Debby recommends that mentors take the initiative of providing beginning teachers with basic information about "fitting into a new school . . . like a new home."

One part of helping beginners fit into the school is helping them to become "a part of the peers" (TAMMI). For example, Debby and Connie appreciate their mentors' having put them in touch with other teachers in their schools who could answer questions that they could not answer. Two beginners wish that their mentors had made more efforts in helping to integrate them into the school's faculty. Becky says, "I think a mentor should try to get you involved with any of the committees or the organizations there at school, at least inform you what they do, what the responsibilities are. . . . I would've liked to have been more involved with the CTA [Community Teachers' Association]." Gail regrets that her mentor failed to invite her to more department meetings after school because of her part-time status, adding that she "would have found something to do with my time until after school."

Another facet of mentors' helping beginners to fit in involves familiarizing them with the norms of the school and the district. For example, RITA recalls telling her beginner about the upcoming faculty Christmas party, and "How elaborate that would be and what she was expected to do." RITA characterizes this information as an example of "Things I guess that just are not written down." Among the participants, Becky, a teacher working in a very small, rural school district, is the most outspoken about this topic. She sought from her mentor information about students' traditions which "They've done ever since who knows when." She also says, "One thing I found beneficial from the mentor is the school politics. I mean, you always need to know those little inside [things]." As an example, she says that her mentor told her about an important but unwritten school district policy. She says, "I was

planning the FFA [Future Farmers of America] and FHA [Future Homemakers of America] social. It was around Halloween, and we had games and a pumpkin decorating contest. And then we were going to have like thirty extra minutes and I wanted to just have a stereo system and let them dance and they said no. He [Becky's mentor] had informed me that the School Board would absolutely flip if we let them dance for thirty minutes."

Other norms which some mentors communicate to their beginners focus more directly on teaching as an occupation. That this is an appropriate role for mentors is evident in Zoe's comment: "Somehow it seems that the year gets started and you're under way before you realize exactly what you're supposed to be doing in order to fulfill your position." She believes that a mentor is valuable to a beginner in confirming that he or she is not alone in making mistakes, letting the beginner know that "other people have made a mistake and fouled up in that way." Mentors suggest other ways in which they help beginners to "adjust" to teaching. LORI suggests that mentors advise beginners, "Don't tie yourself up with tough things just to prove you can do them," and RITA views as one of her roles helping beginners to avoid trying to be a "textbook teacher." Occasionally the mentors also indicate that they try to help the beginners set expectations for their work. For example, DIANE believes that new teachers need "to understand that we can't save the world and we can't change all children. We have to do the best that we can with them within the time frame that we have, and then send them back into the world."

Participants describe other ways in which mentors assist beginners in fitting in. For instance, Becky relates that mentors in her district willingly present the beginning teachers' concerns to the Board of Education at faculty meetings without identifying whose concerns

they are. She says, "We'd write up a list of things we'd want and then we would hand it to them [mentors] and let them bring it up. That was they [Board of Education] didn't know who it was coming from." Inservice activities and graduate coursework are other areas in which mentors sometimes provide advice. ANN mentions that mentors can be a positive influence on a beginner by taking part in workshops and inservices, thereby modeling that worthwhile ideas can be picked up in these settings and brought into the work in the classroom. Similarly, Connie appreciates her mentor saying to her, "Hey, let's go to this professional growth meeting together. This sounds like it might be valuable for the two of us." One mentor, RITA, indicates sensitizing her beginner to the community, reporting: "I know before Christmas I talked to her about decorating her room because we are very close to the Jewish synagogue. We have several Jewish children, and we try to take care of everybody's beliefs. Before she found out by making some mistakes or stepping on somebody's toes." Finally, Ursula, Lucy, and Rachel indicate that they were able to turn to their mentors for advice on personal matters, such as selecting a health insurance plan.

Evaluation

Providing beginners with evaluative feedback on their teaching is a mentor role which elicits strong responses, generally negative, from beginners and mentors alike. Simply put, most participants believe that evaluation is not the mentor's job. For example, IRMA says, "I would never be part of evaluation, or assessment, or working on already diagnosed problems." The separation of the mentor from evaluation is sometimes delineated to the prospective mentor, as RUTH suggests: "We were told, Number One, that what we do with that person has nothing to do with their evaluation. We did not evaluate them." The

beginners are equally vocal in separating mentoring from evaluation. Cathy says that "Mine [her mentor] had none [i.e., evaluation responsibilities] and that's really good that she didn't," and Nora stresses "No, they [mentors] don't evaluate you at all."

Participants suggest several reasons why mentors should not be involved in evaluating the performance of beginners. For one thing, they view evaluation as something that is the responsibility of someone else, typically the principal. For example, NINA says, "I think that [evaluation] should be left to somebody that is more involved in that sort of thing." NINA and RUTH also argue that assessment and evaluation of teaching require special training which mentors generally do not have. "If they want someone to assess their teaching," NINA comments, "then I think they definitely need to have some training." Beginners are sensitive to this point as well, as indicated in Gina's observation: "Those people that are chosen to evaluate you are supposed to be learned in evaluating people, whereas the other teacher [i.e., mentor] may be clueless."

Another reason cited for mentors' avoiding anything that appears to be evaluative feedback or even suggestions for teaching practices is the perceived vulnerability of the beginner to what can be construed as "pressure" to satisfy a mentor's recommendations. For example, SUE says, "I would really fear that the beginning teacher, particularly a young person with not a lot of confidence in [his or her] teaching ability, would say, 'Well, she said do it this way. That must be the right way because she's been teaching for so long.'" Zoe makes a similar observation, noting "You're going to get bad mentors, and you could really get a doozie of a bad one that could really mess up somebody. You could have a terribly aggressive mentor with a terribly passive first year teacher and have all sorts of

difficulties." Lucy also points out that many beginners "immediately would start trying to say what they thought the mentor wanted them to say, as opposed to really relying on their own knowledge about what they need to be doing in the classroom," if the mentors are "going to be judgmental of you, especially if they are involved in a formal type assessment." SUE points out, "I think if you're assessing somebody that you're mentoring, that person's going to tend to buy into your technique." When the mentor has nothing to do with evaluating the beginner, the beginner does not feel that he or she must "perform all the time with the mentor" (Zoe).

The most commonly offered reason for excluding evaluation from among the mentor's roles is the perception that evaluation is incompatible with providing support and encouragement, a situation which Carol says would be "too much a conflict of interest." Like many of the participants, RUTH sees evaluation as standing in opposition to providing help. She comments, "You're not there to evaluate or assess or make judgement. You're there to help." The participants persistently suggest that beginners will no longer trust their mentors and be open with them if they believe, accurately or inaccurately, that they are evaluating their work. For example, ANN talks about "a certain curtain dropping down" between beginner and mentor as soon as evaluation is mentioned. "You need someone you can trust," Lisa states, "someone who's not critical and someone who is definitely on your side." SUE believes that "A beginning teacher's going to be too uptight to really work with a mentor in the way that he or she should, if that beginning teacher thinks that person's also is going to be watching me." Becky graphically depicts the paranoia that she believes arises when mentors become evaluators: "You would not feel open to go ask them questions. You

would tend to keep things to yourself because you wouldn't want to appear stupid. And you would feel that if you went ahead to ask a stupid question, they're going to go, "Aha! Let's mark her down on that. She didn't understand this.'" Interestingly, among all the participants only Mary believes that it is inevitable for a mentor to be evaluating the beginner. Regarding her own mentor, Mary says, "He's not really evaluating me supposedly, but he is, you know."

Despite a general consensus among the participants that mentors should not evaluate beginners, there is also some evidence to the contrary. TAMMI, for instance, describes a mentor as someone who gives "constructive criticism" and ANN specifies as the goal of a mentoring program to help the beginners realize their strengths and their weaknesses. Gail regrets not having more feedback from her mentor. She says, "I probably would've enjoyed hearing some feedback from her as to my teaching ability or techniques. . . . I felt like I was probably less secure by not having a convenient opportunity to get the feedback that I was looking for." In fact, Rachel believes that the mentor would be a good person to evaluate the beginner because he or she knows the beginner better than anyone else. Similarly, Gail does not object to her mentor being a part of her evaluation team, provided that "other evaluations by administrators [and] foreign language supervisors" are included as part of the process. Finally, some participants believe that one role for mentors is to prepare beginners for the evaluation process, sometimes by conducting "mock" evaluations of their teaching. For example, LORI describes her beginner coming to talk with her as she was "getting ready for her evaluation." Connie describes this from the perspective of the beginner: "The evaluation--it's so impersonal. When that time comes, it would be nice to just sit down with

somebody and go over what exactly is going to transpire from Step One until the time that the state receives it [final evaluation]."

The Motivation to Be a Mentor

Participants give several reasons that explain why experienced teachers are interested in serving as mentors to beginners. One reason is simply that mentoring offers teachers a way to help another person. Zoe believes that an important benefit of mentoring for the mentor is knowing "that you helped someone else." Furthermore, mentoring as a helping activity is depicted as something that comes naturally to teachers. "Teachers basically enjoy helping people," IRMA observes, "otherwise we wouldn't be teachers." In fact, in describing her work as a mentor, EVE comments, "I probably do these things automatically anyway. . . . I'm going to be doing those things anyway, whether I'm assigned to mentor or not." Nora makes a similar comment, noting, "And really, I think a lot of teachers are mentors when they're not given that name." Only two beginners suggest that serving as a mentor may conflict with other aspects of the experienced teacher's work. Lucy says that her mentor "was always more into what was going [on in] her class than she was in talking to me," and Gail says that her mentor, as department chairman with numerous other responsibilities, "basically just ran out of time I think, or ran short on time."

Complementing a view of mentoring as another way to help others, several participants also link mentoring to the occupation of teaching, in general, or to the beginning teacher, in particular. LORI sees mentoring as one way "to give yourself to your work." ORA makes a similar comment, observing, "I feel like I owe my profession something and if this is the way I can give it back, that's terrific." Like others, ORA also links this

motivation for mentoring to providing help to someone just beginning a career. She says, "I really think it [mentoring] can be something for a teacher that's down the road and feels like they need to give something back. And you do feel that way. I think you feel like you need to give someone else a good start or to give something back to what your profession is." The motivation is often to make things a little easier for the beginner. IRMA states, "I've agreed to be the mentor because I like helping people and I know how hard it is to begin teaching," and TAMMI says, "I think for the mentor there's the intrinsic value of knowing that your suffering has spared someone else's suffering, [that] they are not going to have to suffer quite as much as you did."

Mentoring as Ambiguous

The comments of the participants provide amply evidence that mentor roles are often ambiguous. For example, NINA reports, "I didn't really know what was expected of me." Gina describes the same uncertainty in her mentor. She says, "The lady that was my mentor came over the third week of school and goes, 'I just realized I hadn't asked you if you needed anything.' And she goes, 'I don't know what I'm supposed to do. I'm just supposed to be your mentor.' You know, and she really didn't know." Heather also indicates a lack of knowledge regarding her role, as a beginner, in working with her mentor. She says, "I have no idea what my responsibilities are and I suspect he probably doesn't either." Likewise, Rachel admits, "I really don't understand what it [mentoring] was there for."

Two beginners admit that their knowledge of even having had a mentor is meager at best. Cathy says, "I don't know what a mentor was supposed to do, but I don't think I had one." Connie has little recollection of having been appointed a mentor, saying, "To be quite

honest with you, I was unaware of this program. I was unaware of the fact that I was supposed to have a mentor this year." Connie also describes how she and her mentor reacted to a meeting with the principal near the end of the year regarding their participation in the mentoring program: "The principal said, 'Well, I believe she is your mentor,' and she went, 'Oh yeah.' I was standing there dumbfounded . . . . We didn't have anything to say. I think we were both embarrassed and felt poorly about it, 'cause it was not mentioned one more time."

Ambiguity about the roles of the mentor is one example of broader ambiguity about mentoring in general. For example, BRUCE believes that it would be "Ideal if we could come up with goals" for mentoring. TAMMI recommends a brief overview of mentoring for all the staff in her building because "It is a brand new program [and] people are really a little unsure that the program actually is. . . . Everybody's got to know the boundaries, whether they're in the program or not." NANCY, who is assigned to two buildings and whose beginner works in three other buildings, suggests that the principals' lack of understanding about mentoring creates a considerable obstacle: "Our principals are very--What do I want to say?--territorial about their time and their people, and they really don't like you to leave, and so most of our time was after school or before school, which made it real difficult."

Guidelines

Most participants indicate a need to provide mentors and beginners with some guidelines about mentoring. Rachel believes that serving as a mentor is a new job for a teacher; consequently, the mentor may not know how to help a beginner. Without some guidelines, the mentoring experience can be frustrating for mentor and beginner alike, as

ORA suggests: "I think they really should've hauled us all in and said, 'If you're going to be a mentor, let us sit down and talk to you about some things that might help or might not help.' Because I've felt very frustrated in the beginning, also, as I'm sure she [beginner] did too." One function of such guidelines is to legitimize mentoring activities. EVE says, "You know, sometimes it's rather vague. It really is, and you don't want to step on any toes. You don't want to be running in there and being a nuisance." NINA also calls for providing prospective mentors with information about mentoring, before they decide to become mentors, so that they know more clearly what they are "getting into."

Many participants recommend that mentors be provided with some written guidelines about mentoring and their part in it. Many of them also suggest a brief orientation meeting for mentors. However, the participants do not advocate extensive training sessions for mentors. For one thing, such sessions are viewed as another demand placed on teachers who often are already involved in many professional activities. For example, Debby says, "I don't think you would have anybody who would want to do it. That's just one more thing [and] there are so many things."

More importantly, several participants imply that skills in mentoring cannot be taught. For example, SUE remarks, "I don't think you can be trained to be a mentor. I don't think you can be trained to be a teacher either, and you learn along the way." Participants also suggest that mentoring is something that "comes naturally." ANN says, "If you're helping someone in the classroom doesn't it [mentoring] come naturally? I don't know what they would train us to do." Carol assumes that a teacher who has rapport with pupils will probably have rapport with adults as well, and consequently make a good mentor.

Some participants are even more negative in their assessment of the value of training for mentors. Heather observes, "I'm not sure that you could train someone to do what good mentors do, which is just support and give help. I mean, sometimes training does the opposite of what it's supposed to do. You know all the theories and you're not sure how to put them into effect." Lisa makes a similar observation, noting that "There are some people who are going to take the training and still be totally inadequate as mentors." Ursula suggests that carefully matching beginners and mentors is more important than providing mentors with any training. She says, "I think maybe what's more important is to make sure that the personalities mesh. That they're going to be comfortable with one another."

Participants suggest several purposes that guidelines for mentoring can serve, both for the mentors and for the beginners. Having worked as a mentor without much guidance, NANCY believes some direction about her roles as a mentor would have been very helpful to her and her beginner. She says, "I think we'd have had a little better idea of where we were going and what the expectations were for us before the year was over." Connie makes a similar observation, noting, "I think the mentor needs to know what they're doing. What the purpose is and what things should be accomplished through the program." Gail also suggests that guidelines can communicate what is already known about effective mentoring. She says, "I do feel some training would certainly benefit those people because they would be given, probably, some guidelines to follow. . . . They're doing whatever they feel would be effective as opposed to what's been shown to be effective in other areas."

Participants suggest that guidelines can foster effective mentoring in two other ways. First, several beginners stress that guidelines can help mentors to anticipate the needs of

beginners. Ursula is very direct in making this point, saying, "Sometimes you're so dumb you don't even know what to ask them, and they have to have some kind of guidelines." Debby makes a similar comment, observing that guidelines "would be very helpful and I think that would lead to answering a lot of the questions maybe that either a brand new teacher may be afraid or embarrassed to ask about, thinking 'I should know this but I don't,' and maybe reminding the mentor of some things that no new person could know of but [that] just don't occur to her [mentor]." Lucy describes as "certainly wonderful" any training that would have helped her mentor to know in advance some of the things she needed. Without outlining the needs of beginners to mentors, Becky believes there exists an obstacle to making the most of mentoring: "As a first year teacher you don't think of these things to ask. You don't know what to ask them. And they don't know what to tell you. So you have a communication problem. They don't know what to tell and you don't know what to ask."

A second purpose for guidelines is to prevent beginners from failing to take full advantage of mentoring as intended. ORA believes that guidelines would help her beginner "to know what I was there for, and what kinds of things she could come to me about." In addition, both Debby and IRMA point out that guidelines would make it clear to beginners that they have a right to turn to their mentor for help. As IRMA says, "For the beginning [teacher], it gives them a sense of stability to know that they <u>have</u> somebody there whose 'job' [is] to help them. . . . So you don't feel like you're honing in on this other person."

Although the participants generally favor guidelines, they are also believe that such guidelines must be flexible. "I hate to see it get too specific," observes MARGE, "because

each case is going to definitely take a different road." Mary recommends guidelines as "Sort of a rough outline," and Rachel sees them as "A place to start." According to IRMA, overly prescriptive guidelines may undermine spontaneity: "When you start writing down 'Have to's,' it eliminates something else that might have come to your mind because you're working on these 'Have to's.'" Particularly troubling to Debby is the prospect of bureaucratizing guidelines for mentoring activities: "The only problem that I would see is putting too much red tape on . . . making it so bureaucratic that it becomes an albatross. [A] lot of times, trying to be helpful you overburden or put so much red tape. Here's another form to fill out about this. Whereas before . . . 'Sure, I'd be glad to show somebody through the building and go in, be friendly, help her find different things.' But if it require you to take this class, fill out these forms . . . I don't think that would help the whole program."

Incentives

Except for RUTH, who participated in a mentoring program in another state which paid experienced teachers a stipend to serve as mentors, participants generally minimize financial incentives for mentors. Many participants express sentiments similar to those of Heather: "I think that [i.e., providing mentors with extra pay] would be nice because it's extra work." Some beginners, however, believe that what is required of the mentor is too insignificant to warrant a financial incentive. Becky asks, "I mean, how long does it take to answer questions?" and Debby comments, "I don't think the job's that big. In essence, it's more like being like a good friend." NINA also finds paying mentors extra for "sharing the experience they had gained" uncalled for--unless "you have to fill out reports. If you have to

do this sort of thing and that sort of thing, then I would say Yes." However, upon learning that in some programs in California mentors were paid as much as $4,000 extra per year, participants react by assuming that the California mentors must necessarily do much more as mentors. "Good grief," remarks Connie. "Well, they must have an awful lot to do." NINA makes a similar observation: "For that type of money there should be more expected of the mentor than just being somebody to stand by in case a person needs help. I really do think there should be other things to do."

Discussion

In general, the participants interviewed in this study support the provision of assistance to beginning teachers, counselors, and librarians in the form of a mentoring program pairing beginners with experienced colleagues. However, it appears that little guidance was provided to them (or if it was provided, that is was not understood) about what is involved in mentoring, including the various roles that mentors can play. In fact, even though the participants were identified by school officials as being part of a mentoring program, a requirement in the state for the beginner's first license renewal, some of them were very uncertain--even near the end of the school year--that they were part of a "program." Such vagueness is certainly related to the fact that the local programs designed to meet the state requirement were in their first year of implementation. It also accounts for the participants' consistent emphasis on the need for more guidance, in the form of written guidelines, orientations, or brief training sessions for mentors.

Within this context, it appears that most of the participants defined the primary roles

of mentor as a provider of (1) emotional support and (2) assistance with logistical matters. These roles are important ones for mentors, as evident in recent analyses of mentoring in the school setting (e.g., Bey & Holmes, 1990, and Huling-Austin, 1990). However, the participants in this study give little evidence that mentoring roles also include a focus on other critical elements of teaching, such as curriculum design, instructional strategies, and professional development. One key factor contributing to the participants' relatively limited view of mentor roles may be that they participated in a program of one year's duration. Research on the development of beginning teachers suggests that the "survival" needs of beginning teachers during their first year or two of teaching call for such emotional support, but that in time these needs give way to needs related more directly to the skills, techniques, and strategies of teaching (Feiman-Nemser, 1983; Fuller & Bown, 1975; Veenman, 1984). In another respect, the participants' remarks support Little's (1990) contention that the present organization of teaching and the structure of schools provides an inhospitable environment for mentoring roles directly related to teaching. For a variety of reasons, the participants' in this study present a vision of mentoring that is far less rich and varied than it might otherwise be.

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Table 1

School District Characteristics

	Characteristics					
District	Enrollment	Elementary Schools	Junior Hi Schools	High Schls	Teaching Staff	Average Salary[1]
Harrison	20,000 to 25,000	40-50	6-10	6-10	1,000 to 1,500	$28,000
Pierce	1,000 to 2,000	1-5	1-5	1-5	100-200	$25,000
Fillmore	< 1,000	1-5	0	1-5	< 50	$20,000

[1] Instructors, certified staff, and administrators

Table 2

Mentors--Selected Characteristics

	Characteristics					
Mentor	Sex[1]	Race[2]	Age range	School level	Teaching experience (in years)	School district
NINA	F	Wh	46-55	Elementary	16-20	Fillmore
SUE	F	Wh	26-35	Secondary	1-5	Harrison
TAMMI	F	Wh	26-35	Secondary	11-15	Pierce
RITA	F	Wh	> 56	Elementary	26-30	Harrison
DIANE	F	Wh	46-55	Elementary	31-35	Harrison
NANCY	F	Wh	36-45	Elementary Counselor	11-15	Harrison
IRMA	F	Wh	36-45	Elementary	21-25	Harrison
ORA	F	Wh	36-45	Elementary	16-20	Harrison
LORI	F	Wh	46-55	Elementary	11-15	Harrison
BRUCE	M	Wh	> 56	Secondary	36-40	Fillmore
ANN	F	Wh	46-55	Elementary	11-15	Harrison
MARGE	F	Wh	36-45	Elementary	16-20	Harrison
EVE	F	Wh	36-45	Elementary	16-20	Harrison
RUTH	F	Wh	36-45	Elementary	21-25	Harrison

[1] F = Female M = Male [2] Wh = White

Table 3

Beginners--Selected Characteristics

	Characteristics					
Beginner	Sex[1]	Race[2]	Age range	School level	Teaching experience (in years)	School district
Zoe	F	Wh	< 26	Secondary	1-5	Harrison
Ursula	F	Wh	36-45	Elementary Librarian	0	Pierce
Heather	F	Wh	36-45	Secondary	0	Harrison
Lucy	F	Wh	46-55	Elementary	0	Harrison
Mary	F	As	36-45	Secondary	6-10	Harrison
Debby	F	Wh	36-45	Elementary	unknown	Harrison
Rachel	F	Wh	26-35	Secondary	0	Harrison
Carol	F	Wh	36-45	Jr High	0	Harrison
Connie	F	Wh	36-45	Elementary	1-5	Harrison
Becky	F	Wh	26-35	Secondary	0	Fillmore
Gina	F	Wh	26-35	Secondary	1-5	Harrison
Nora	F	Wh	26-35	Elementary	0	Harrison
Lisa	F	Wh	36-45	Elementary Librarian	0	Harrison
Cathy	F	Wh	46-55	Elementary	0	Fillmore
Gail	F	Wh	36-45	Secondary	0	Harrison

[1] F = Female [2] Wh = White As = Asian